

Members

Rep. Duane Cheney, Chairperson
Rep. Charlie Brown
Rep. John Aguilera
Rep. Ralph Ayres
Rep. Mary Kay Budak
Rep. Don Lehe
Sen. Sue Landske, Vice-Chairman
Sen. Marvin Riegsecker
Sen. Joseph Zakas
Sen. Nancy Dembowski
Sen. Rose Antich
Sen. Earline Rogers



NORTHWEST INDIANA TRANSPORTATION STUDY COMMISSION

Legislative Services Agency
200 West Washington Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2789
Tel: (317) 233-0696 Fax: (317) 232-2554

LSA Staff:

Ross Hooten, Attorney for the Commission
James Sperlik, Fiscal Analyst for the Commission

Authority: P.L. 140-2001

MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: September 9, 2003
Meeting Time: 3:00 P.M.
Meeting Place: 6100 Southport Road, Northwestern
Indiana Regional Planning
Commission
Meeting City: Portage, Indiana
Meeting Number: 2

Members Present: Rep. Duane Cheney, Chairperson; Rep. Charlie Brown; Rep. John Aguilera; Rep. Ralph Ayres; Rep. Don Lehe; Sen. Sue Landske, Vice-Chairman; Sen. Marvin Riegsecker; Sen. Joseph Zakas; Sen. Nancy Dembowski; Sen. Rose Antich-Carr; Sen. Earline Rogers.

Members Absent: Rep. Mary Kay Budak.

Rep. Cheney called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m..

The first topic considered by the Commission was funding for the Lake County Regional Transportation Authority. The Authority's president, Dennis Rittenmeyer, contrasted the

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development of a mass transit network across the state line in the Chicago area with Indiana's single commuter rail line. Mr. Rittenmeyer explained that in Illinois mass transit is funded with local sales taxes throughout the Chicago area. In Lake County, the municipal bus lines are funded with the property tax and services are limited to the territory of the particular municipalities. The Authority wants to eliminate this dependence upon the property tax and ultimately enable the bus lines to extend services beyond jurisdictional lines. Mr. Rittenmeyer stated that the Authority would need \$3,700,000 to replace the property taxes now devoted to mass transit.

Mr. Rittenmeyer also reported that the authority needs an additional \$2,000,000 to fund a required study for two proposed extensions of the commuter rail line: (1) to the east to Valparaiso; and (2) to the south to Lowell.

When asked by Rep. Cheney for the total amount of the Authority's needs, Mr. Rittenmeyer answered that the amount is approximately \$6,600,000 with the remainder of that amount earmarked for the implementation of a multi-systems transportation plan.

In 2002, a vote by the Commission to recommend legislation authorizing a food and beverage tax to fund the Authority ended in a 5-5 tie and failed for a lack of a majority. Funding legislation was later introduced in the 2003 session of the General Assembly without a recommendation from the Commission, but did not receive a hearing.

The Commission discussion then turned to the Authority's preference for a food and beverage tax as its funding source. The Commission reviewed its options with Rep. Cheney pointing out that the Porter County Council had recently discussed using county economic development income tax (CEDIT) revenues to support mass transit. The Commission discussed the options of authorizing a food and beverage tax or suggesting that Lake County turn to CEDIT revenues. The discussion focused on two points: (1) the fate of the 2003 legislation; and (2) the Lake County Council's historic reluctance to impose an income tax. Rep. Aguilera added that the Lake County Council has on two occasions indicated that it supports the Authority's request for a food and beverage tax. The Commission did not take a vote or reach a consensus on the issue.

Rep. Cheney then opened the floor to comments from the public. Tim Brown, Cedar Lake Town Manager, expressed his support for authorizing a food and beverage tax to fund the Authority. Mr. Brown explained that he believed an income tax to be a much more regressive tax than a food and beverage tax.

Joe Meell, representing the Healthy Communities of LaPorte County, and Carl Scott, representing Parents and Friends, Incorporated, described the unmet transportation needs in LaPorte County and the region generally. Both expressed their support of the Authority's efforts. When asked for his views on a funding mechanism, Mr. Meell said that he favored the use of CEDIT.

The second topic considered by the Commission was the development of the 2030 Transportation Plan. James Ranfranz, Executive Director of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), and Dan Garner described the process for developing the plan and updated its current status. They described the types of projects that will be included in the plan and the three constraints on the planning process: (1) financial;

(2) air quality; and (3) societal inputs.

Rep. Cheney asked for clarification on the use of the plan. Ken Dallmeyer, NIRPC's chief of transportation planning, answered that projects receiving federal funding must be in the plan. Mr. Ranfranz added that the Indiana Department of Transportation's projects will come from the plan as well.

The final topic considered by the Commission was a status report from the Northwest Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD). John Parsons, NICTD's marketing director, reported that ridership is down slightly, on-time performance is improving, and the 2003 capital program is nearly complete. Mr. Parsons also reviewed the progress on the new East Chicago station and the traction power sectionalizing project.

Rep. Cheney adjourned the meeting at 5:15 p.m.